

# **World of Warcraft™ and the State of Territory in International Relations**

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GLOBAL GOVERNANCE: POLITICAL AUTHORITY IN TRANSITION

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All comments welcome.

Jeppe Strandsbjerg  
Department for Business and Politics  
Copenhagen Business School  
Steen Blichers Vej 22  
DK - 2000 Frederiksberg  
Denmark

E [js.dbp@cbs.dk](mailto:js.dbp@cbs.dk)  
P (+45) 3815 3506  
F (+45) 3815 3555

## ABSTRACT

According to conventional knowledge, the realist tradition in International Relations has maintained the world of International Politics in a perpetual state of 'warcraft' between sovereign territorial states. Since the early 1990s arguments associated with Historical Sociology have sought to counter such a timeless image of states and politics. Yet, while this has done much to historicise state institutions and the international system, one of the fundamental features of the modern state remains poorly understood: that of territory. This is because, I argue, that the concept of space remains absent from the historical analyses. Historical Sociology proper usually treat territory as an unproblematic transhistorical concept and Constructivist approaches tend to focus on how perceptions of space interrelate with historical developments of institutions. Both tend to leave space as unhistorically accepted, conceptually assumed and philosophically unexamined. The solution I propose in this paper is to expand what we do historical sociology about; that is a historical sociology of space formation which investigates how space historically has been established as real, and hereby, had a conditioning and transformative effect on the political role of territory. This is key to understand to spatial nature of the modern state and thus, also, the transformative possibilities within international relations.

## INTRODUCTION

According to conventional knowledge, the realist tradition of International Relations (IR) theory has maintained the world of International Politics in a perpetual state of 'warcraft' with no possibility of change. Global space was, and is, divided into sovereign states struggling for interest defined as power, survival and primacy. The settlement following the Second World War and the ensuing Cold War gave salience to an image of a stable system where change would not occur to the foundational building blocks of the system: the sovereign states. As such the sovereign state became the central building block for rationalist IR theories trying to explain and describe the political options in the international realm.

From the late 1980s, however, this picture was gradually challenged by emerging constructivist approaches emphasising the historical contingency of the sovereign state and so-called modern international politics. Constructivism was nurtured by a sense of radical transformation as the Cold War came to an end and globalisation became the new 'buzzword' in social science (Scholte 1996). There is a mushrooming literature on global governance and related literatures that share the attempt to explain politics without privileging the sovereign state as the natural starting point for the analysis. As such, the advent of globalisation in alliance with

constructivism has challenged the privileged position of the state in IR; it has been argued that the state is no longer the most relevant level to study social practices.

This concern fed into a concern with the historical origins of the international system in order to better understand space. Both historical sociology and constructivist scrutinised the concept of sovereignty, supposedly the essential concept of the discipline, in an attempt to make sense of politics beyond the state (Biersteker and Weber 1996; Bartelson 1995; Agnew 2005; Paul 1999; Osiander 2003). However, what this concern with sovereignty and change in IR has generally neglected is a crucial question: sovereignty over what (Elden 2005)? In this paper I seek to argue that the constructivist challengers to the rationalist IR theory have neglected the significance of territory in their attempt to interrogate sovereignty. As I will argue, there is an undercurrent in the constructivist literature that the state, sovereignty and territory are somehow becoming less important than it has been assumed previously. But in making these arguments the concepts of space and territory tends to be marginalised in the analysis.

Employing the online computer game World of Warcraft (WoW) as an analogy to the way in which the world has been portrayed in IR theory, I argue that the world of constructivism looks more like the WoW than it resembles the real world. In the WoW game, the world is generated with no constraints outside the gaming world. The world map in the game works as a structure that constrains the actors but also provide a condition of possible action. In the real world (for lack of a better term) the world map (understood as spatial representations) also serve as a conditioning and enabling structure but it is not generated without constraints of the material landscape. And it is this relation between the material landscape on the one side, and the formation of states and the conduct of politics on the other, that is insufficiently theorised in IR.

It is the notion of essential spatial change associated with globalisation that points to the limitations of the constructivist approaches. Constructivism in IR needs a greater awareness of the apparent solidity, rather than the constructedness, of things in order to account for the changing nature of the state, territory, and new global practices. This lack makes the analysis of systemic change in IR abstract and oddly detached from the spatial locatedness of socio-political practice. As such the article will contribute to the understanding of space and territory in the attempts to theorise global change. This argument will display how and why constructivism has

started out promising in terms of historicising the essential categories in the discipline of IR but is left wanting in the attempt to understand territorial space in contemporary conditions of change. In conclusion this article argues that constructivism needs to take its constructivism further while at the same time introduce of notion of reality in order to cope with the apparent solidity of territorial practices in global politics.

As such the paper draws on an emerging academic interest 'new materialism' that seeks to re-introduce materiality into sociological studies without making the material deterministic (Bennet 2009; Latour 1987, 1999, 2005). I argue that we need to employ a historical sociology of space in order to make sense of the current transformations of sovereignty and territoriality. Doing that the paper seeks to move forward the agenda set by constructivists, such as, Friedrich Kratochwill (Kratochwill 1986), John Ruggie (Ruggie 1993), Nicolas Onuf (Onuf 1989), and Alexander Wendt (Wendt 1999) and whose writings have established knowledge concerning the historical contingency of key categories such as the state, territory, boundaries and sovereignty. It is commonly accepted that such phenomena are the result of historical processes, and this is an argument that plays into an understanding of the contemporary world of international relations as being historically contingent and therefore subject to change. However, what has remained largely unscrutinised within the constructivist literature is the specific concept of space itself. In that, the present paper is also a call for a greater engagement, in IR, with the literature in human and political geography that also deals with spatiality, sovereignty, the state, and borders.

To begin, this article will unfold the significance of territory for IR as a discipline in a historical context, then, I will present an account of the spatiality underwriting international relations drawing an analogy to the game World of Warcraft, and discuss the shortcomings of constructivism for capturing the state of territory in IR. Finally, I will discuss a notion of world-making and introduce the science studies of Bruno Latour in order to suggest a way of analysing space historically which can more adequately capture the changing spatiality of globalisation.

## THE STATE OF TERRITORY

There was a certain sense of harmonious correspondence between a world of sovereign nation states and the Cold War. The spatial image of the state seemed a

perfect match with the spatiality of the world. To the extent that it was theorised at all, territorial space was implicitly conceptualised as a billiard ball; as a solid unit interacting with other units according to the mechanical physics of Newton. One ball moves, hits the neighbouring one and thus causes a reaction. The right policy within this world ought to be one pursuing a balance of power seeking to prevent the movement of any ball, and thus preserve a stable system. The main lines of conflict were supposedly those between territorially defined states constituting a system whose image was a collection of different coloured territories projected on to the map of the world. From one side, the aim was to contain and prevent further spread of the opposite colour. Territorial exclusivity was the rule of the game. The enemy was kept at bay through containment and wall building.

Yet despite the rigid image of a globe divided into sovereign states, there was very little theoretical concern with the spatial underpinnings of the discipline. In Waltz' classical formulation of Neorealism neither space nor territory featured in the system. Echoing Max Weber's famous definition of the state, it is sovereignty that defines states and constitutes them as like units, yet in a manner symptomatic of rationalist IR's neglect of space, there is no reference to what sovereignty is over, what it refers to, and what limits it. Not even when Waltz argues that domestic governments have a monopoly on the legitimate use of force are 'territory' or 'boundaries' mentioned (Waltz 1979: 93-97). Not a word about territorial space. It thus seems poignant when John Agnew noted that it "has been the geographical division of the world into mutually exclusive territorial states that has served to define the field of study [IR]" (Agnew and Corbridge 1995: 78). Yet, at the same time, these assumptions have been left unexamined and rather than being theorised as a central concept, space plays a marginal role in most IR theory.

As the Cold War came to an end, the static image of world politics resonated less and less with events. There was more talk about a new world order, humanitarian intervention, and the conflicts in (then) Zaire, Rwanda, and (then) Yugoslavia raised the concept of identity on the research agenda. In the attempt to conceptualise a changing constitution of world politics, or maybe more precisely, a new way of organising space, politically, the conceptual link between state, sovereignty, identity, and sometimes territory, was deconstructed (Kratochwill 1986; Ruggie 1993) (Lapid and Kratochwil 1996; Campbell 1998). This literature pioneered a

historical understanding of the link between sovereignty and territory as the foundation of the modern state, and hence, modern international relations.

### *The Significance of Territory*

The Westphalian peace treaties of 1648, because the treaties legalised the principle of territorial sovereignty meaning that the ruler could exercise legitimate sovereign authority within a specific territory (see Croxton 1999) or whether we accept the symbolic year of 1648, or the 19<sup>th</sup> century as claimed by historical materialists,<sup>1</sup> as the beginning of modern international relations, it is the territorialisation of sovereignty and the state which marks the significance of this transition. It signified a 'spatialisation' of the state and society and can be best understood as a reversal of the relationship between space and society.

In the words of Edward Soja, medieval society in opposition to a modern society can be understood as a "*social definition of territory rather than a territorial definition of society*" (Soja 1971: 13 italics in original). In medieval Europe the territorial scope of a ruler's domain would, simply speaking, be constituted through personal ties of allegiance. Hence, it would be the network of personal relations between a ruler and various lords and clergymen that would decide the extent of the territory. During the renaissance, the state, or the crown, was gradually abstracted from the person of the ruler in a process of depersonalisation of authority. Instead, the state was becoming associated with, and identified by means of, its territory. It would now be the territorial boundaries that would decide the extent of the ruler's authority, and hence who would be included and excluded (for a more detailed presentation of this argument, see Strandsbjerg 2010).

It is important to stress that territory *per se* is not a modern invention but the meaning and role it takes on changes dramatically. In consequence, it would be more correct to say that the character of international politics (in Europe) changed during the early modern era rather than claiming that 1648 marked the genesis of such relations.<sup>2</sup> And one of the key features of this change was the transformation of the spatiality of the state. The argument in the further below is that the key to understand this transformation does not only lie in a new configuration of sovereignty and territory but in a transformation of space itself which allowed this reconfiguration.

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<sup>1</sup> For a good presentation of this dispute see Teschke (2003).

<sup>2</sup> For an overview over international relations in the Middle Ages, see Ganshof, F. L. and R. I. Hall (1971). For an attempt to theorise the international dimension as a general aspect of social theory, see the work of Justin Rosenberg (2006).

Without a transformation in cartography and other measurement and calculation technologies it would not have been possible to use space to delimit sovereignty according to strict territorial boundaries (Biggs 1999) (Strandsbjerg 2008). Hence, it was a spatial transition which altered the workings of international politics by altering the conditions of sovereign rule.

In Jean Gottmann's seminal work *The Significance of Territory*, "territory appears as a material, spatial notion establishing essential links between politics, people, and the natural setting" (Gottmann 1973: ix). In his view territory is significant "as the unit in the political organization of space that defines, at least for a time, the relationships between the community and its habitat on one hand, and between the community and its neighbors on the other" (Gottmann 1973: ix). The link between territory and sovereignty is essential but also one that is changing over time as "the basis for the enforcement of the law subtly shifted from allegiance to a personal sovereign toward controls exercised by the sovereign power in geographical space. The partitioning of space thus acquired an increasing significance, and territorial sovereignty became an essential expression of the law coinciding with effective jurisdiction" (Gottmann 1973: 4).

The significance of territory, then, lies in the spatialisation of state sovereignty that served as a basis for the conceptualisation of international politics as something taking place between spatially differentiated but similar (in that they are sovereign) entities. This has been the self-understanding of the IR discipline, where the peace treaties of Westphalia are seen as the foundation of modern IR (Walker 1993). And it is important to recognise this while at the same time remembering that territory has much wider meaning and the understanding of political space should not be limited to simply territory. The problem for IR, as I will show, rests in its failure to discuss territory as a spatial issue, and hereby overlooking a significant condition for the territorialisation of sovereignty.

It is difficult to capture this general spatial transformation if it is maintained that the history of IR can be described as a transition from pre-modern hierarchical non-territorial modes of rule, to a modern territorialisation of politics, and then towards a post-modern globalisation eroding territorial modes of rule. Especially because such a view ignores the intricate relation between the formation of singular global space, being a precondition for subsequent global practices, and the formation of sovereign territorial states. Several authors have argued that the state and

globalisation should not be considered antithetical to each other (Niemann 2000; Lacher 2005 & 2006; Brenner 1999). Historical evidence suggests that this is indeed the case. The unification of a global space, first, through cartographic practice and, second, through global networks of trade, production, and empire building preceded, or co-evolved, with the described spatialisation of the state in Europe (Escolar 2003). The transformation described by Ruggie, which will be discussed subsequently, of the mode of representing and knowing space was about a new cosmography transforming the reality of global space as a meaningful reference for social practice. The globe was constructed as a unitary space subject to European power politics and eventually providing a stage for globalising European empires.

This intricate relationship between the development of a global space on the one hand, and state formation on the other, is difficult to grasp if the focus is solely on territory, boundaries, or sovereignty as the frequent topics of constructivist analysis. A spatial historical analysis is a better tool to grasp such connections. Territory, of course, is a spatial concept, yet space should not be reduced to territory or boundaries because this would reverse the order of priority: territory and boundaries are derived from space and not the other way around. In the following I will present an analysis of the present arguments concerning territory, state, and sovereignty through an analogy with the computer game World of Warcraft (WoW).

## THE WORLD OF WARCRAFT

The World of Warcraft (WoW) online computer game represents one of the biggest gaming successes in recent years. Early 2008, the game reached the 10 million subscribers mark, and the game has been the fastest selling game ever.<sup>3</sup> The basic setup of the game is an online world(map) created by the developing company, Blizzard Entertainment, in which the individual players create a single character. The world is complete with towns, monsters, and adventures. As a player your character is free to do whatever you want it to do. You can sit on a hill and do absolutely nothing or you can, as most people do, go out on adventures where you fight monsters and find treasures. It is frequent for players to meet up, in the game, with other players and form groups and alliances that fight and go on adventure together.

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<sup>3</sup> See press release from Blizzard Entertainment of 22 January 2008, <http://www.blizzard.com/us/press/080122.html>, accessed 07 August 2008.



Figure 1 (for mere entertainment). Screenshot from WoW: The Warlock, Len, fighting a vicious boar. Go to <http://www.worldofwarcraft.com/index.xml> for your free trial.

Essentially the game is made up by a stage, controlled by the developing company Blizzard Entertainment, and actors controlled by the individual subscribers. They are free to choose what they want to do – within the limits that are naturally set by the structure of the stage. The stage is essentially a cartographic construction, where the virtual reality is provided only by the map.<sup>4</sup> Hence, the map presents a reality in which the actors can act, and they constrain certain practices but also sanction others, and as such the stage presents the conditions for possible action without determining what the players have to do.

Reading the structure-agency debate into WoW it is clear that the structure conditions the possible actions by the actors but there is no causal relationship. However, if gamers want to follow the spirit of the game and play in any meaningful sense, then they would have to explore the world and they would have to

<sup>4</sup> Of which you can buy an atlas in book form so you do not get lost in the ever increasing world. So far there have been made two additions where continents were added to the original world map.

fight and form alliances (clans) with other players in order to increase their power and their wealth. In that sense it is a given world of warcraft and power games. And obviously, as an individual player you have to take this set-up for granted and there is no chance that you, on your own, can change the rules of the game. This analogy obviously lends itself to the Neorealist approach to understanding world politics. The structure of the game and the relationship between the structure and possible agency is taken as a given leaving only little room for the agents to manoeuvre beyond the set path of power politics.

In order to grasp the spatial challenge of globalisation in IR, constructivist have been preoccupied with showing that actors do not have to engage in warcraft, that they do not have to act in specific way, and indeed that their identity and interests are social constructions. Generally, they have done this by a) deconstructing the structure and showing that this is a historically contingent presence rather than an inevitable condition for politics. b) deconstructed the identity of the actors broadening the scope for possible agency within any present structure. As such they have rightly pointed out that the world map providing the stage for the world of warcraft is merely, and a somewhat arbitrary construction. And acknowledging that implies that a different world could be made.

Now, I want to argue that constructivism in general have been better at deconstructing a world like the one of warcraft<sup>tm</sup> than the real world. My argument is, as I will show below, based on how constructivism is generally concerned with ideas and institutions. In order to avoid the spatial determinism, and the naturalisation of sovereign territory, they have written any materiality of space out of the conceptualisation of territory. In consequence, they have neglected the assemblage of the world. How come we can talk about a stage of politics? What is the stuff that territories are made off?

WoW alerts us to the fact that the space of the world is not an obvious natural fact but something that is produced and sanction certain causes of action over others. But WoW also alert us to fundamental difference between the constructedness with no given constraints, and the kind of constructivism, that I would advocate, where material matters are brought back into the theory. This means that there should be left theoretical space for a spatial construction that emerge through the interaction between ideas and human practice on the one side, and material matters on the other. Historically the unification of global space where centred on the inclusion

of coastlines, mountains, rivers etc. into a coherent cognitive system where they could be contemplated as being part of a singular spatial reality.

The programmers at Blizzard Entertainment can alter their world at will, while the mapmakers of the real world (for a lack of a better term) are constrained – to a degree - by the existence of various natural features. Yet, this difference exactly alerts us to the weakness of social constructivism. While highlighting the social constructedness of spatial phenomena such as territory, they tend to downplay the materiality, or solidity, of things. This is what is commonly understood as nature.

### *A Spatial Subject/Object Divide*

The problem with most IR theory is that territory, and hence space, is either taken as a physical backdrop of the state, or it is taken as a social construction being derived of some other social practice. In the former model, territorial space is nature and therefore considered to lie beyond social theory; in the latter model, territorial space is a cultural construction. The trouble with this divide is that it affirms a prevalent subject/object distinction which maintains a firm nature/culture divide which is indeed problematic for the attempt to understand the spatiality of the state, and hence the spatial underpinnings of IR.

Knowledge is political, of course, and reality is a social construction. However, questions concerning politics/knowledge and reality/construction have never been the most important ones because, as Bruno Latour reminds us, regardless of how we answer the dispute for or against absolute truth, for or against multiple standpoints, for or against social construction, the issue of “how human beings can speak truly about events, about the irruption of new objects into the world” (Latour 2002: 77) always remains.

The constructivist tradition in IR has established how identities and interests are the result of social processes, and hence subject to change. Furthermore, the impact of knowledge production has been high-lighted because, it is said, knowledge helps to shape the world supposedly subject to this very knowledge. Constructivism in IR has, thus, firmly established how reality is a social construction, and how knowledge is political, yet, constructivism is still struggling to provide an adequate understanding of spatial transformation because they operate with a distinction between what is social. Within this distinction they maintain the materiality, or the solidity, on the nature side of the divide and, in effect, the historical construction of space is treated as ideational, or linguistic practice void of any

reference to a material geography. In sum, constructivists struggle with space because they tend to maintain a solid distinction between what is social and what is nature, and then keep the constructivist focus on the social side of this divide.

### *Constructivism on Spatial History*

Now it would be unfair to state that constructivism is blind to the change in the spatiality of the international order. On the contrary some of these considerations are at the core of constructivist concerns. However, as I will show, they are not taken far enough.

It is a general premise in the constructivist tradition that the world and the role of the state is changing (see for example Ferguson and Mansbach 2004). The global level is taking on increasing significance for practices of security, economics, law and identity. This has caused a degree of self-reflection in IR; if state politics become less significant what is the role of the discipline originally devoted to the study of inter-state relations? Some authors cope with this by branding the new epoch 'a post-international era' of global politics rather than international politics (Ferguson and Mansbach 2004: 1-33). Yet, such a solution leaves an unsatisfactory account of the role of the state in current politics because it sustains a troubled opposition between the state and the global. As long as globalisation is defined as antithetical to boundaries it is near impossible for IR to theorise globalisation,<sup>5</sup> which would exactly be a significant aim of constructivism.<sup>6</sup>

Central to the concerns of constructivism, are the concepts of sovereignty, identity, and territory. Quite often these are located in a historical context dividing (European) history into a pre-modern, a modern, and now a possible post-modern epoch. The historical transition from pre-modern ('pre-international in the words of Ferguson and Mansbach (Ferguson and Mansbach 2004: 31)) to the modern serve to emphasise the historical contingency of the modern system, illustrate the process of change, and make feasible a similar transition of modern IR of yesterday to a post-international, or post-modern, global politics of tomorrow.

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<sup>5</sup> This point is inspired by Nieman's critique in *A Spatial Approach to Regionalisms in the Global Economy* (2000).

<sup>6</sup> There is nothing inherent in the constructivist approach that determines a concern with globalization but in IR occupation with constructivism has been fuelled, I would suggest, with a concern with change of the international order and an attempt to theorise this change. Several of the prominent constructivists are concerned with globalization (Wendt 2003; Ruggie 2003 & 2004; Ferguson & Mansbach 2004; Ferguson 2006).

John Ruggie's *Territoriality and Beyond* (1993), for example, presents a thorough analysis of the transition from medieval to modern spatiality, and use this to suggest a future route of polity formation (on EU level). Ruggie placed special emphasis on the (re)invention of a single point perspective in visual art which indicated a notion that territory could be viewed and ruled "...from a single fixed viewpoint" (Ruggie 1993: 159). Importantly, he claimed that political inclusion and exclusion should not necessarily be understood in territorial terms. Although territoriality was relatively fixed in medieval Europe, the notion of territory did not entail mutual exclusion (Ruggie 1993: 149-50). With these arguments, Ruggie ascertained the historic specificity of the sovereign territorial state, and thus the configuration of the international system. "The central attribute of modernity in international politics has been a peculiar and historically unique configuration of territorial space" (Ruggie 1993: 144).

In order to understand the epochal change from the medieval to the modern political system, Ruggie states that we must grasp the fundamental change that occurred in the way political space was conceived. The "...demise of the medieval system of rule and the rise of the modern resulted in part from a transformation in social epistemology. Put simply, the mental equipment that people drew upon in imagining and symbolizing forms of political community itself underwent fundamental change" (Ruggie 1993: 157). The key point to this change was that political space changed from being organised around a variety of authorities, all ultimately subject to the universal realm of god, to being "*defined as it appeared from a single fixed viewpoint*" (Ruggie 1993: 159, italics in original). The single-point perspective had implications for a wide range of visualisation and representational techniques, such as cartography, allowing for the visualisation of political space in the shape of neatly demarcated territorial spaces.

It is not the aim here to contradict Ruggie's analysis but rather to suggest that he does not take this analysis far enough, and therefore, his suggested contemporary change to territorial rule is less convincing than his analysis of historical change. The problem with Ruggie's analysis, with regard to territoriality, is that he focuses on how the world is perceived and represented on a very general level. It is as if these representations are only a result of ideas and social practices (i.e. development of individualism and early capitalism). He is less concerned with how the materiality of geographical space affects these 'knowledge technologies' and

particularly, how space affect social practice. While looking at visual culture today there are obvious breaks with a modernists 'single point perspective' drawing, however, when looking at spatial knowledge technologies it is improbable that a similar change is taking place. This suggest that a more detailed analysis differentiating between how different ways of knowing space are linked with different types of social relations. I.e. the advent of abstract art representing space differently from a modernist perspective does not necessarily translate as an epochal change in the political organisation of space.

In conclusion, with reference to WoW, constructivism is generally concerned with the interaction and construction of players, and to show why the world is not necessarily one of warcraft. They show how the defining identity of actors (sovereignty and territory) is a result of the social historical processes. Yet they tend to neglect how it is that we can talk about a single world *in spatial terms*. It is as if the world is a natural stage for states to act upon rather than this itself being the result of historical processes. This, I would suggest is because constructivism differentiate a social realm in which there is construction, and separate a natural realm, that of geographical space, which is deemed to lie outside social theory. This is what I point at by emphasising the subject/object divide. Instead, what is necessary is to focus more on the processes of world-making to understand the spatial stage of global politics.

### WORLD MAKING<sup>7</sup> (a historical sociology of space)

If global space can no longer be consider external to what is socially constructed it is necessary to broaden the notion of 'social' to mean more than the interaction only between humans. This is a central concern of Bruno Latour's science studies. He is famous for studying the processes of science and how knowledge is *fabricated*. Key to Latour's writings is that the commonly upheld distinction between 'language' (subject) and the 'world' (object) is flawed. Even though this distinction is rarely maintained as sharply as the above presentation might suggest, the central point made by Latour is that as long as we maintain an essential gap between world and language the problem will essentially remain.

The solution he offers is, firstly, to argue that there is no essential gap – world and language are not separate domains. Instead of operating with a notion of

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<sup>7</sup> The title for this section is inspired by a fine short book by Nelson Goodman (1978).

referents that either represent or perform a world - and thus bridge the gap between world and language - he adopts a notion of *circulating referents* that circulate between *humans* and *nonhumans* in a continuous process. Simply speaking, the point is that both humans and nonhumans affect the referent and hereby propositions are not a property of the human only. Therefore, *nonhumans* 'have agency too' and also decide propositions. In an IR context, I read this as a way of 'giving causality' to 'the material', however, without in any way pre-defining this causality. Even more importantly, *nonhumans* is not a constant – 'nature' is not a constant. This is not an argument about how forests grow, mountains erode, or volcanoes erupt, but rather it is an argument saying that the world of *nonhumans* enters a relationship with *humans*. They form what Latour calls a collective that both transforms *humans* as well as *nonhumans*. As a phenomenon, space does not occur in the sudden encounter between space as 'a thing in itself' and categories of human understanding (Latour 1999: 71). Instead, Latour argues that "phenomena are what *circulates* all along the reversible chain of transformations, at each step losing some properties to gain others that render them compatible with already established centers of calculation" (Latour 1999: 71-2). The 'reversible chain of transformations' describes the process through which scientific facts are established.<sup>8</sup> This is a process of several stages in which observations stage by stage get rid of 'locality, particularity, materiality, multiplicity, and continuity' (Latour 1999: 70) – in a process called *reduction* – where what is observed is plotted down on a piece of paper or a computer. Simultaneously, at each stage of reduction the representation obtains greater 'compatibility, standardisation, text, calculation, and relative universality' (Latour 1999: 70). Hence a phenomenon circulates in between particular observations and a generally 'universal' body of knowledge with which it is made compatible in its transformation to a fact. This is a somewhat complicated argument, yet phrased simply, phenomena are not something that either materially exist or achieve formal existence only through language, but rather, are something that achieve an identity through many stages of interaction between *humans* observing, testing and interacting with *nonhumans*.

[m]ost of the difficulties we have in understanding science and technology proceeds from our belief that space and time exist independently as an unshakeable frame of reference

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<sup>8</sup> In *Science in Action*, Latour (1987) is framing his project as opening the 'black box of science'. By this, he indicates that the processes of producing scientific facts have been ignored; partly due to their complexity, and partly due to an unwarranted belief that these processes do not affect the nature of the facts produced. It is the project of science studies to open and scrutinize the black box of science.

*inside which* events and place would occur. This belief makes it impossible to understand how different spaces and different times may be produced *inside the networks* built to mobilise, cumulate and recombine the world (Latour 1987: 228).

Opposed to the Kantian notion of space and time residing as static and universal categories, space and time, for Latour, is something that is being fabricated within networks and what he calls *centres of calculations*. Rather than being a natural frame, “space is something generated *inside* the observatory” (Latour 1987: 229). That is to say that space, as a phenomenon, achieves reality as an autonomous thing at the specific site in which measurements and observations are assembled and represented. Hence, even though ‘Western Science’ claims to be universal, it is by its very nature a very local achievement. Even a universal cartographic representation of the earth or the universe is put together at a specific site, in a particular workshop. Here it is important to remind ourselves that just because something is fabricated does not mean that it is unreal. Latour is not down-playing the significance of space, rather, it seems that space is a requirement for other scientific practices. He hints at this in *Pandora’s Hope*, when he comments on the significance of two maps used on a scientific expedition in Brazil:

Remove both maps, confuse cartographic conventions, erase the tens of thousands of hours invested in Radambrasil’s atlas, interfere with the radar of planes, and our four scientists would be lost in the landscape and obliged once more to begin all the work of exploration, reference marking, triangulation, and squaring performed by their hundreds of predecessors. Yes, scientists master the world, but only if the world comes to them in the form of two-dimensional, superposable, combinable inscriptions (Latour 1999: 28).

This is so because science, or more generally action, cannot take place in a universal and abstract space. Science practice needs to be able to navigate, collect, assemble, and combine with existing knowledge in other sites. This argument asserts the centrality of knowledge of space: in order to do something planned somewhere this somewhere has to be known. Otherwise one would enter as a stranger. Imagine going to an unknown city without a map; the only way to find somewhere would be to ask the locals for directions – to rely on local knowledge. If in possession of a map, the knowledge of the locals is irrelevant for you would be easily able to navigate the city and get to your destination on your own.

Hence, social practice requires space to be made present, known, and navigable and this is the role of cartography. Space, as a phenomenon, is established through cartography as a *circulating referent*. Space, as a term, does not point to any

specific object in the way the word 'tree' points to a specific organism. Space both points to distances and locations but also to specific *nonhuman* features such as land. What is significant is how these features are being included into the establishment of space. Referring to the example about navigating a city, knowledge of space is about familiarity (Latour 1987: 220). Hence, people will always have knowledge of the space with which they are directly familiar. However, action at distance (larger-scale coordinated action such as trade or scientific expeditions) requires familiarity with the places one seeks to act at. In order to do this, unknown sites have to be made mobile and compatible with what is already known. Compatibility is almost self-evident because if you wish to add to what you know, new knowledge has to have a form which makes it possible to combine with what you already know. Mobility is maybe less self-evident, but not less important. For an unknown place to be made familiar, knowledge of this place has to be combined with knowledge at another site (since all knowledge production is local). Hence a system of referents has to be employed in order to make sites *mobile, keep them stable, and combinable*, in order to combine various places. Latour names the place where such referents are combined a *centre of calculation* (Latour 1987: 223). The centre of calculation is a site, a laboratory for example, where circulating referents are combined, calculated, and developed. In the context of space, it is the site where places are made mobile, assembled and established as a reality of space. Scientific cartography does all the above, it allows places to be rendered mobile, kept constant and combinable (Latour 1987: 223). Hence, the map-makers' workshop, or a royal court that controls such a process, will act as a centre of calculation. They constitute a hub in a network of navigators, surveyors, cartographers, printers, etc. which are all necessary for geometric cartography to develop. "Cartography is one network cumulating traces in a few centres which by themselves are [...] local" (Latour 1987: 229). But cartography also allows this centre to act at a distance on other places that have become available to those at the centre. To give examples, a king would be able to capture and plan travels in the entire kingdom by looking at a sheet of paper on his wall; the Dutch East India Company would be able to plan the route of fleets in their map room, and so forth.

Rather than reaching new land, then, the significant point of the early European expeditions to the rest of the world was to bring the new places back home in order to facilitate a return voyage. Without this ability, the trip would be wasted,

the ships would disappear in the horizon and not participate in enlarging known space. "By coding every sighting of any land in longitude and latitude [...] and by sending this code back, the shape of the sighted lands may be redrawn by those who have not sighted them" (Latour 1987: 224). Thus, in the words of Latour, "the cartographers in Europe start gathering in their chart rooms – the most important and costliest of all laboratories until the end of the eighteenth century – the bearing of all lands" (Latour 1987: 224). The consequence of this massive endeavour is a transformation in which cartographers come to dominate the world, which means that the *nonhuman* aspect of space loses power, in the sense that capes, corners, vast spaces become less and less of a danger and an obstacle to trade and travel.

In sum, Latour's writings provide us with a tool to analyse world-making where what is normally considered nature is included in the 'construction' so to speak. In comparison with Ruggie's analysis discussed previously, Latour's notion includes a materiality of space which account for the solidity of space.

## DECONSTRUCTING THE WORLD OF WARCRAFT

The main suggestion put forward in this article is that the constructivist tradition in IR needs to expand the scope of what it considers constructed while, at the same time, has to pay more attention to what constrains change in these very constructions. In order to grasp whether contemporary change invokes a change to the spatial identity of the state, it is necessary to move the analysis beyond a narrow focus on territory to include a broader perspective on space. Until this is done the state of territory in IR will remain in a world of warcraft denying the possibility to integrate territorial politics with globalised social practice.

The transition from medieval politics to the territorial order commonly described as the modern international order did indeed involve a territorialisation of sovereignty. However, it was not only a question of change to territoriality but to a more general notion of space. The way in which knowledge about space was transformed, and it was this transformation which provided the conditions for the spatialisation of politics. Therefore, when comparing contemporary change with the historical transition it is flawed to ask whether there is a shift from a territorial level to the global level in order to assess whether there is a similar change in territorial rule. Rather, it is necessary to question whether there is a change to spatial underpinnings

to territory and sovereignty. And if there is not then the spatial conditions for territorial rule have not changed to the extent that many globalisation advocates suggest.

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